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DCI MEETING WITH REGIONAL: NIO/USSR1. Status of USSR NIEs: An update.

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Tentative bottom line: The Soviet Empire may be headed for the ashheap of history, but they haven't gotten the word yet and can give us a lot of trouble in the meantime.

2. Soviet Succession

Essential story has not changed since last talking points supplied; but it could at any time.

Chernenko may have passed a severe crisis and be recovering; but a normal leadership role is not likely to recover with him.

"Constitutional" displacement of a sitting General Secretary is a trauma and a threat to the ruling oligarchs more painful than a short period with an incapacitated leader. They would much rather let him die in harness.

Gorbachev probably doesn't have the succession locked up. In fact, many of the allegations that he does may be weapons against him.

There is a fair chance that the succession could spill outside the Politburo and become a major political crisis with longer term consequences even if quickly settled.

3. Soviet Strategy in Afghanistan, 1985: Will They Try Harder?

Soviet frustration with the campaign suggests that new efforts will be made to turn it in a visibly favorable direction. Local developments indicate heightened effort to get better results with given resources:

More aggressive small unit commando tactics, gaining Mujahedin respect.

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Augmentation of light tactical air in and near Afghanistan.

Heavier involvement of Soviet forces in combat.

Increased pressure on Pakistan.

At home, the Soviets are increasing the volume and candor of their propaganda on Afghanistan. It is now depicted as a real war with heroes, losses, and a call for a patriotic response. In conjunction with the 40th VE anniversary and the party congress, this attention may give hostages to fortune. One senses that the Soviet leadership feels on the hook to deliver some real progress this year. Can the Mujahedin and Pakistan roll with the punches?

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